

Reflections on Bev, Reflections on “Native American Contemporary Music: The Women”

Anna Hoefnagels

The impact that Bev has had and continues to have on her students past and present is evident not only in our academic successes, but also in the relationships, collaborations and networks of support and encouragement that keep us connected with each other and with Bev. Through email correspondence, newsletters, cards and coffees at conferences, Bev continues to reach out to her students in ways that remain meaningful and extremely influential. Indeed, when teaching various classes on Canadian music and First Peoples’ music, I invariably use many materials written by Bev, and each time I reread her work I am reminded not only of her wealth of knowledge, but also her human approach to research and her relationships with everyone around her.

One article that I use for teaching, and that has also been very influential in my own work is her 2002 article “Native American Contemporary Music: The Women.” In this article I find there are so many topics that need to be discussed with students, and that I need to consider and reconsider in my own work. One of the most important lessons I learned from Bev over the years was that through respectful questioning and engagement with ideas and themes, ‘theory’ emerges. I remember as a PhD student feeling intimidated by all the postmodern theory and the “-ologies, -ics, and -isms” that I was exposed to for the first time and feeling pressure to engage with and apply these theories to my research. Bev repeatedly assured me that themes and ‘theory’ will emerge from the materials generated from interactions with musicians and the materials with which I was working. As Bev models in this article, one of the primary challenges of the researcher is not to find *the* answer, rather to find meaningful and respectful questions from various perspectives so that complex and sometimes nuanced issues and themes emerge.

Of course, Bev also has the insight to highlight important themes and the eloquence to challenge readers in gentle, yet direct ways. This is evident in the excerpts from her fieldwork that open this article, as she draws a connection between the cramped dancing space for the powwow dancers in the church and the “historic confinement by Western institutions,” (Diamond 2002: 11) and the “strength of emerging alliances between African American and Native American artists” (11). However, Bev also shows how she, in turn, learns lessons from the musicians with whom she works, which challenges some of her assumptions: “The strategies of defying stereotypes related closely in my mind to other instances of resisting cultural oppression. My own feminist orientation led me to see these as small-‘p’ ‘political choices and actions’. On at least one occasion, however, I was stopped short when I tried to proceed with my ‘political’ frame in place.” (25) This kind of open

reflective/reflexive engagement with her research shows readers (and students) that an important part of doing research is to challenge our own assumptions and worldview, and to constantly engage in issues as they arise and impact on our own views of the world and of ourselves.

One of the other things about this article that I think is important is how Bev models the role of the researcher less as the authority, and more as the person facilitating discussion or dialogue. Despite her years of experience and breadth and depth of knowledge, she doesn't take the position as the authority on the topics discussed in this article, rather she offers insights and engages with the materials shared with the musicians to draw out themes that resonate with the women's experiences. This style of ethnomusicological research and writing is indicative of contemporary attitudes towards respectful collaboration and giving people voice, things that have always been central in Bev's teaching approach and her relationship with her students and colleagues. Bev always recognizes the importance of, and gives space for, the voice and experience of individuals, and doesn't seek to generate grandiose generalizations.

While reflecting on this article vis-à-vis the festschrift for Bev, I can't help but think that some of the important themes and ideas that emerge in this article are indicative of many of Bev's philosophies and world view, as well as some understandings of feminism. For example, Bev addresses the importance of relationships throughout this article and the interconnectedness of all people, things and experiences; she writes: "the importance of connectedness, trust and close relationships" (31). This is an important lesson from many Native traditional teachings, and it illustrates the complexity of human relationships and the networks or connections that exist in various communities; Bev urges readers "to think about all kinds of relationship (to environment, to community, to all the Others of individual experience)" (14). Related to this is the importance of respect, "sharing and caring," and "walking the talk," basically the centrality of humanity, which are considerations for many Aboriginal activists and community leaders. Similar central and resonating themes include seeing music as a form of social action, and the philosophies that the women that are interviewed share – including the importance of honouring one's gift(s) and doing things not for status or prestige, but because they can. Indeed, some of the women interviewed "saw their talent as a special gift and a responsibility to use that gift for the good of the people" (16) and that "winning is not the important thing" (23). These are the same kinds of ideas that emanate from Bev, even if they are not explicitly stated.

Finally, the closing sentence of the article illustrates not only one of the important points of this study, but in many ways might reflect Bev's attitude towards her collaborators, students, and peers: "Their music insists both on their individuality and on an array of solidarities." (33) The notions of individuality and solidarities inform not only Bev's interaction style and respect for each person, but also the relationships that

develop and grow through the connections she fosters and encourages. Bev's research, teaching style and personal relationships with people are all interconnected, and they show her commitment to ethnomusicology, First Peoples' music research, humanity, and respect.

Marcia Ostashevski

My own research, to date, has not focused on the music of Native Americans or other aboriginal peoples. Nonetheless, my academic development—research and teaching—has been influenced by scholarship related to native peoples through explorations of music and culture lead and inspired by Bev Diamond. More specifically, the place, history and experiences of indigenous peoples in the history of Canada and many nation-states around the globe have become an important focus in academic discussions in relation to post-coloniality. The experiences of indigenous peoples and the concept of indigeneity has thus become a focus in many discussions of identity and culture.

In my own research on Diaspora, hyphenated identities, the movements and confluences of cultures and peoples, I have explore the relationships between representations of culture/identity (often problematically) characterized as originary or native, ancient, “primitive” or “natural.” Among and about Ukrainians in Canada, I have noticed a lack of attention to relationships between Canada's First Peoples and Ukrainian immigrants. These relationships existed, and continue to exist, as told to me by research consultants who identify as Ukie-Cree or Oji-Ukrainian. As a result, I have begun to explore complementary perspectives regarding the histories and life experiences of these individuals and their communities which are themselves a result of the transcontinental dispersions of people and reconfigurations of communities. This is a hybridity which has not been consistently addressed in museums or public memory or scholarship at all, to my knowledge, though it is characteristic of Canadian life today.

Moreover, in my role as a teacher of music, culture and communities in Canada or on other continents, I am compelled to include material related to native peoples. For example, in both a “global pop” course I began teaching a few years ago and a course on “gender and performance,” I include Bev's article “Native American Contemporary Music: the Women” (2002) as one of a number of resources on Native American music and culture). I have been teaching with this article for a number of years, and hope to add something to this discussion with reference to my experiences of teaching and learning at Nipissing University in the near north of Ontario, Canada.

In the context of a course on gender and performance, I assigned this article as a means of learning about the ways in which some Native women understand, construct and perform their identities vis-à-vis creative expression (and particularly music). It is a carefully nuanced piece which demonstrates the diversity of experiences and

understandings of these women, who also share a common aspect of identity. Indeed, it is this diversity which has resonated powerfully with the students in this course. As an example, a woman who identified herself to the class as Inuit told the class of how strongly the article spoke to her own experiences as a Native woman and mother. She said that other Native studies scholarship she'd encountered had little to do with her own experiences and history, that it had perhaps been more reflective of more familiar Native groups in Ontario or prairie-based nations. All people seem to know about Inuit, she said, was the throat singing (and here she pointed out that it isn't even really singing but a game). She felt that her experiences, family and community histories, and worldview were not represented in these more familiar ideas about Native peoples. It was a strong affirmation of her own experiences to have Bev's article reflect a number of different experiences, all as equally valid aspects of Native women's' identity. She added that such an approach also made space for any number of possibilities in addition to those presented in the article. This student related some of her experiences moving from the north of Canada into more southern, urban centers and noted that these kinds of movements of individuals resulted in a number of different experiences in a single person's lifetime. This raises the notion of one's identity changing over time, influenced by one's own specific life history and understandings, as well as one's environment—rather than a characterization of a person or peoples' identity as a bounded and unchanging thing. This student also noted that her teen daughters were Native women, but not the same way their mother is; their father was not of the same group of people as their mother, nor did they grow up in the north as their mother did, and this meant their understandings of themselves as Native women were different as well. Bev's article, which explores relationships between traditional and contemporary and other seemingly disparate aspects of history and culture, and acknowledges that both ideas are part of the fluid identities of the Native women she writes about, allows for many different ways in which women might understand, experience and express their Native-ness. This is affirming, as in the case of the student I've described. It also provides scholars, like me, material with which to teach about Native identity in ways which challenge stereotypes and notions of homogeneity. As a final note, the last time I saw this student she was working at a local shop to save up money—within a few weeks time she was moving to Peterborough to Trent University to begin her a Master's degree in Native Studies. With a grand smile, she told me that Bev's article is what inspired her to pursue this particular path of education.

Finally, I'd like to discuss this article with respect to my teaching in the global pop music course. It is one of a number of articles which students encounter as part of a unit I've titled "Aboriginal Musics on the Global Stage." In this unit, I focus on contemporary Native musical production in Canada, and explore the ways in which these musics are connected to histories, geographies and central issues (including appropriation, [post]colonialism, identity and resistance) raised in the music and

processes of its production. First, I'd like to point out that the reason I include this unit in this course is because of my understanding of the importance of including content regarding Native peoples' experiences and related issues in academic work which directly results from my learning with Bev. I know of other young academics who include this content in their courses, for similar reasons, so this is one immediately apparent way in which her work has been instrumental in shaping academic curriculums and discourse.

The students in the global pop course read Bev's article after they have read Karl Neunfeldt's article on narratives of Native and Metis identity, and along with journalism about (and listening to music of) Susan Aglukark and Buffy St. Marie. They finish the unit by reading more recent scholarship on rap music in Native communities in Canada, and material from the annual music issues of the indigenous arts and culture magazine *Spirit*. The CDs which accompany these issues provides musical examples which consistently surprise students. Neunfeldt's article, in my opinion, provides for a good starting point in this unit, because it articulates a number of identity narratives, some of which are familiar stereotypes. This is the reason why students are surprised by the rap music and other contemporary genres they hear on the *Spirit* compilation CDs—because it does not often fit the familiar stereotypes about Native people and their music! Bev's article, though, which offers an evocative counterpoint to the material in Neunfeldt's article, begins to take them to this point of realization. While the narratives in Neunfeldt's article may be quite familiar, Bev's article begins to demonstrate diversity with respect to Native identity as well as raise issues related to the gendering of identity. Bev's work provides a by which we might begin to understand the variety of experiences and musics of contemporary Native musicians, which facilitates further explorations of same. In this context in the course, for example, we go on to examine different concepts and strategies of resistance, and consider more carefully the specificities of production of musical examples in relation to political economy and other aspects of society, their reception as part of by wider cultural and historical contexts, their sounds and lyrics as meaningful in multiple ways. Moreover, this work allows for an understanding of Native music as part of cultures that are not dying so much as living and changing, resilient and adapting (as all cultures continue to be), as part of Canada's or more localized and also larger transnational discourses, networks and “-scapes” (Appadurai, as cited in Tim Taylor's “Global Pop...” textbook which I use in the course). My students have always remarked that this section of the course profoundly affects them for, even though our town borders reserve lands, our university is branded with the name of this local First Nation, and a large contingent of our students come from northern Ontario rural/small town areas (though relatively few Native students are among them), too many are quite unaware of much of anything about Native culture, identity or histories. Bev's work with Native music, musicians

and communities has had and affect on me as a student, learner and teacher, and will continue to be a powerful part of the understandings of Native peoples of our students.